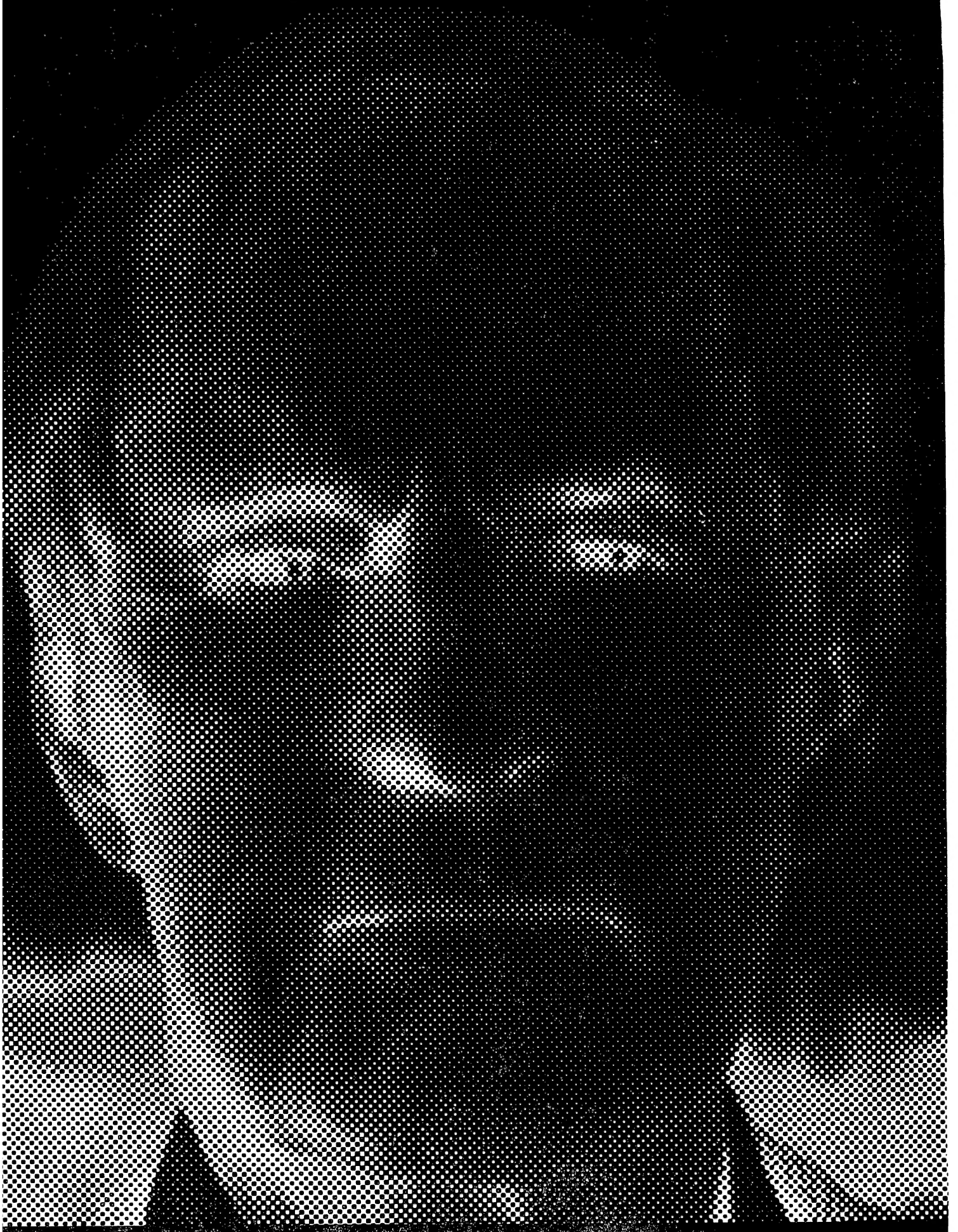


Timothy Leary's Dead...



...nah, but he ain't

Alright, maybe I was nervous. I mean, this was the "high" priest, the infamous ex-Harvard professor who turned on a generation, the man who did for LSD what Paula Abdul now does for Pepsi. I've dropped my share of acid, but he's the one who put the *idea* in my head. I started sweating as I drove up serpentine roads to his Beverly Hills home. I was frightened about what I'd find: the onetime Pied Piper of Youth now an ogre living in a cave? A blabbering burnout with feta cheese where once was brain matter? What if he blows my mind and I can't find my car keys or something?

I shouldn't have worried. Timothy Leary's been a senior citizen for six years, but he's still as sharp as a silicon chip. Friendly, too. In fact, he was so friendly, he:

1. Brought me some ice water;
2. Let me play with his big, hairy dogs;
3. Gave me a computer printout of a revised afterword for his autobiography, *Flashbacks*;
4. Showered me with magazines to read. (Tim likes to highlight and annotate entire paragraphs, just like any good student.)

When he finally sat down, the first thing out of his mouth was, "What's the greatest thing you've ever done in your life?" (Telling my parents to get lost.) As we sat high above the smoggy L.A. basin (it looked like we were high above the clouds), we dug into a forty-five-minute gabfest. He listened carefully to each question, paused, and then gave his answer in a solid, digestible block. He lobbed neurogenetic one-liners with a craggy New England inflection. The quip I remember most was, "People say I've gone off the deep end. What the fuck end am I *supposed* to go off? The *shallow* one?" Just Say Know, indeed.

But, like I said, I was nervous. I fucked up. I had tuned my cassette player to 'radio,' not 'tape,' so I recorded forty-five minutes of scratchy AM hip-hop, not the Leary interview. Gulp. Tim, cool enough to lend me a book, consented to *another* round of questions, this time by phone:

Your aunt used to admonish you to "Conform, Timothy, conform." Why'd you disobey her?

I don't know. Seemed like a good idea. I didn't like the kind of life she led. She wasn't very happy. She was very concerned about what the neighbors thought.

How are you "totally Celtic, totally Druid?"

I don't think I am *totally*. What they say about the Celtic and the Druid tradition is that they're very independent, fiercely resistant to state authority. They're very poetic. Their use of language is extremely important to them. They're very ceremonial and indulge in intoxicated ceremonies. They just don't fit easily into conformist social situations.

What risks come with being a frontiersman?

Well, it depends on the frontier. You're never gonna have a company paycheck. But you're asking specifically about me. I've been living in America, which is an extremely free, safe country for dissidents. In any other country in the world, I would have been permanently jailed or probably silenced.

Today's media tend to "Mansonize" the sixties.

The news, commentary, and opinions that appear in newspapers, magazines, and TV are totally manufactured and designed to produce realities. Produce artificial realities. And the techniques used to channel thought or to deal with dissidents—one is to ignore them; the second is to trivialize them and make them seem foolish and unimportant; and the third is to demonize them. In the case of Manson, Manson is no threat to the American security, believe me. He's a person that probably should be kept in jail, but his power to create mischief is totally limited. [He's a] totally impotent, powerless person. He's used as a demonic, diabolical figure to characterize an entire generation of seventy-six million people.

You've said that what used to be called 'spiritual' is what we now call 'digital.'

Yes. Using a computer to digitize your thoughts, your images, your sounds, and combining them at the speed of light, hurling them over telephone lines or through radio waves, is trading realities which are immaterial, invisible, incorporeal. Write down the list of all the words that used to define 'spiritual,' and you'll find that quantum, or digital, communication—using computers—meets that definition.

You tend to view American learning institutions as prep schools for ignorance.

Every educational administration is charged by society—this is throughout history—with the mission of preventing young people from thinking for themselves and instilling in young people the traditional and conventional rituals and points of view. By definition, educational systems are factories of conformity and conformist thinking.

When did you decide to discard traditional Eastern thought?

There are several things about the oriental religions that I don't like. One is the concept of 'master' and the authoritarian aspect. The second is the anti-woman aspect. Oriental gurus, the men, tend to dress up in robes, and many of them preach, or even *practice*, celibacy. And third, the oriental religions' basic theories anticipated quantum physics, [but] their methods of communicating and practicing thoughts are four or five thousand years old.

Why the "stand-up philosophy" in nightclubs? Aren't philosophers supposed to be sullen, hermetic self-flagellants?

[Laughs] Never heard *that*. A philosopher is someone who performs intelligence, who loves wisdom and performs it publicly. Basically, a performing philosopher thinks for herself or himself in private or public. Everything I do in writing, giving interviews like this, talking in academic halls or nightclubs, is thinking for myself on my feet. By definition, philosophers can and should perform anywhere and are people who are interested in interacting at the philosophic level. I'm going back to the Socratic method. Although, throughout human history, most wisdom, certainly most dissident ideas—novel, innovative ideas threatening to the establishment—have been passed down in terms of humor. People like Swift or James Joyce. Eminently comic. Or Thomas Pynchon—his great works, epic, encyclopedic works—are very hilarious. Comedy and humor are the keys to wisdom, because they're based on the Einsteinian notion of relativity, of putting two ideas

gettin' any younger!

together in a novel way. Or interactions that are implausible or strident or revealing. Basically, humor is a quantum mechanical device—it fissions structure, and it collapses traditional meaning. That's a relief—expressing laughter.

I don't trust Jeane Dixon—what's *your* forecast for the future?

The next ten years are going to be extremely volatile. Ignorance and religious warfare and violent repressions will occur, because the next ten years are gonna be a period of incredible change, and change makes people nervous, especially when they see the traditional structures collapsing. People get panicky. And politicians are very skillful at inciting and inflating hysteria of this sort, so you're going to see repressions and witch-hunts.... On the other hand, you're going to see an enormous increase in intelligence in the next ten years as more and more human beings understand how television and the establishment control our thoughts, and more and more people will begin to start thinking for themselves. ■

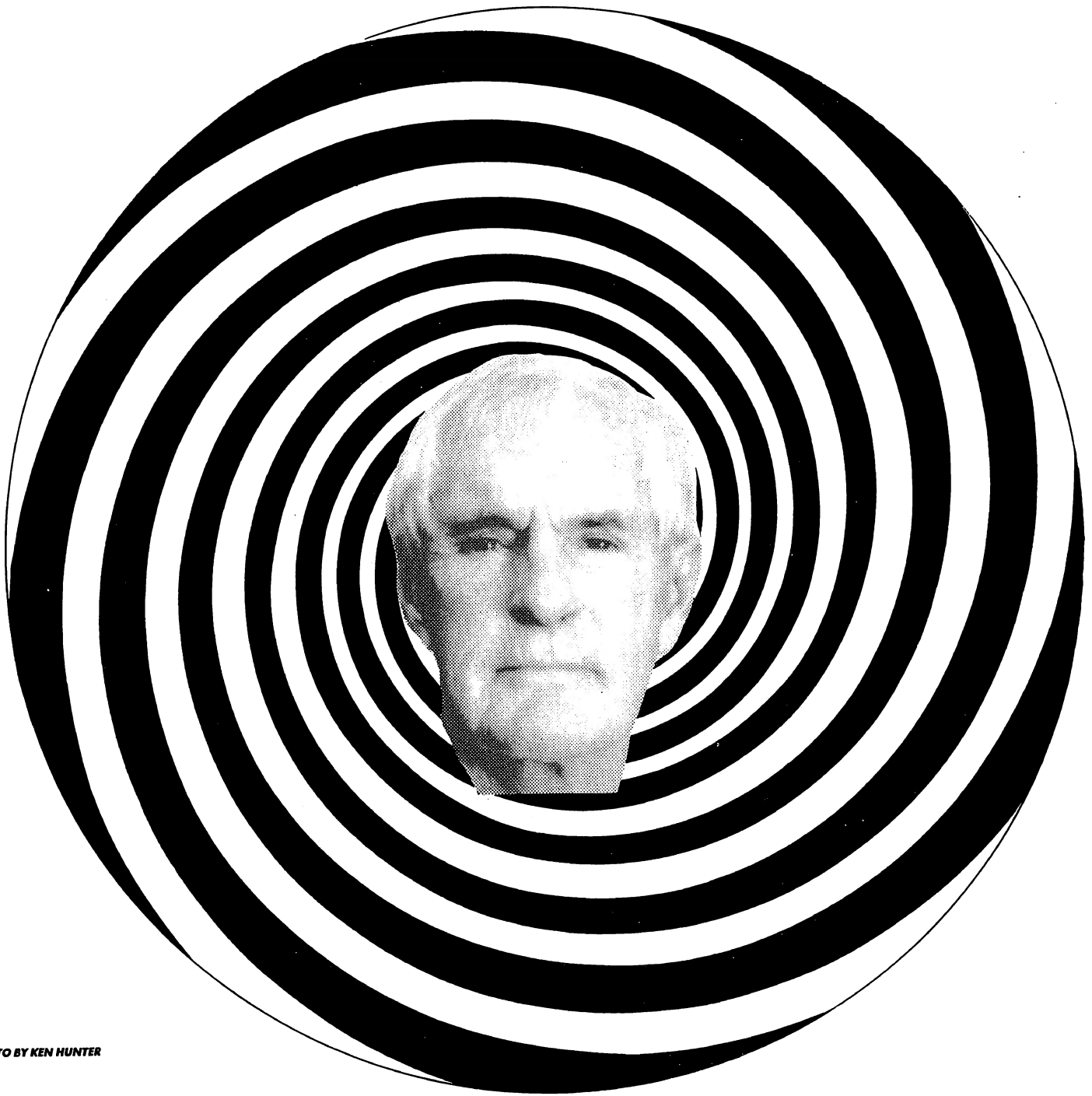


PHOTO BY KEN HUNTER